

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0902/09
by Eleonora Lo Curto (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Sea crossings and the need to maintain links between the Sicilian islands, Sicily and the mainland

The Commission needs to pay particular attention to the reduction of ferry services and the associated problem of maintaining links with the mainland, which is of vital concern to residents of the Aeolian and Egadi islands, Pantelleria and Ustica, in connection with the privatisation of the Italian Siremar shipping company, which is part of the Tirrenia group. The Treaty provides that services which are of major public interest may be subject to derogations from the privatisation process in the light of the adverse effects of island status on economic and social development.

In view of this alarming situation and the need to help find solutions which protect the rights of local residents,

1. Does the Commission agree that the sea crossings between the smaller islands must be maintained at all costs, if necessary by means of derogations from Community legislation requiring contracts for maritime services to be awarded on the basis of an invitation to tender?
2. Does the Commission agree that, for the benefit of local residents, it is essential to impose an obligation to guarantee frequent and regular services at reasonable prices?
3. To what extent, and when, does the Commission intend to authorise the provision of funding for Siremar to operate these sea crossings, without such subsidies being regarded as state aid?
4. Does the Commission not consider that, at a time of economic crisis such as that which is now affecting the whole of Europe, the privatisation of the Tirrenia group of companies should be postponed?